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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 August 2018]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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Human Rights situation in the People's Republic of China

Society for Threatened Peoples is deeply concerned about arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial detentions of Uyghurs and Kazakhs in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in People's Republic of China. Starting in April 2017, Uyghurs and Kazakhs accused of having "strong religious views" and "politically incorrect" ideas have been detained in political re-education camps throughout the XUAR. Uyghurs and Kazakhs are complaining since years about religious repression, cultural destruction, sinicization and discrimination.

Satellite photos are documenting that these re-education centers have been increasing in size in summer 2018. Construction work has been carried out in many camps since January 2018. For example one camp close to the city of Kashgar in Western XUAR has doubled in size since November 2017. The full extent of this re-education program was long obscured because there is no free access for human rights experts or independent journalists to XUAR. A senior Chinese official, Hu Lianhe of the United Front Work Department, publicly acknowledged the existence of these camps in August 2018, but said they were "vocational training centers" and denied mass incarceration.

Despite massive fears many family members of Uyghurs and Kazakhs are reporting about a wave of arbitrary arrests of Uyghurs of all ages and very different professions. Some Uyghur inhabitants of villages declared that almost no young men are left in their villages. Other ones reported that most of the adults in their region are required to attend some kind of political indoctrination or training. Every Uyghur or Kazakh family has members been forced to attend political education. Entire villages have been emptied due this program of forced political indoctrination. Chinese official data on criminal arrests are indicating that in the year 2017 a fifth of all criminal arrests in China were registered in XUAR, despite that the region only has a population of 20 million, a minimal percentage in comparison to China's 1.4 billion inhabitants.

In some areas of rural XUAR, the internment program has increased to a dramatic size. So for example, in the Kuchar county of Aksu Prefecture some 45,000 people have been detained in re-education camps due to information of local officials. That is slightly less than 10 percent of the local population. Some camps have 5,000 to 10,000 inmates, other camps up to 15,000 detainees. These Re-education centers are lacking any legal background. They are violating Chinese laws and numerous international human rights conventions. Interviews with former detainees and local officials are indicating that some 660,000 residents of Southern XUAR have been sent to re-education camps. The total number of Uyghur and Kazakh detainees for XUAR may be as high as one million or more.

There are many indications that besides these camps China's State Security has forced up to 1.3 million Uyghurs and Kazakhs to attend mandatory day or evening re-education sessions in their villages or towns. These evening "study sessions" in political re-education are evoking tragic memories of horrendous crimes against humanity committed in the name of the powerful Communist Party during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Many older Uyghurs still are traumatized due to this psychological terror.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the U.N. Human Rights Council to urge the Government of the People's Republic of China:

- to immediately dissolve the illegal re-education centers and to free all detainees,
- to stop the re-education program with its mandatory day or evening sessions on political training,
- to free all Uyghur and Kazakh political prisoners,
- to ensure the respect of basic human rights for all citizens of XUAR enshrined in Chinese laws and international human rights conventions,
- to invite U.N. human rights experts to XUAR to visit re-education centers and to provide free access for independent international journalists to XUAR.